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ABSTRACT

Community colleges are in a strategic position to educate citizens to understand international developments, as they provide educational experiences to a large number of grass-roots Americans. In the past, community colleges have placed little emphasis on international understanding because of lack of commitment to international understanding as an educational goal, the conservative orientation of many communities, limitations of faculty backgrounds, lack of effective curriculum materials, and lack of flexibility in the curriculum. Community college administrators need to make a commitment to teaching international understanding, and to help faculty members overcome provincialism. Suggestions for more effective curriculum materials are given. (RS)

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EDUCATING FOR INTERNATIONAL UNDERSTANDING: A ROLE FOR COMMUNITY COLLEGES

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The Need

One needs to reflect only briefly upon events of the past two years to realize that we have entered a new era in our relations with other countries of the world. This development affects very directly people in all walks of life. While issues such as nuclear arms control are still very much with us, it is becoming evident that countries are more interdependent than has generally been assumed for such things as fuel, food and even the air we breathe and the water we drink.

Community colleges are in a most strategic role for preparing our citizens to understand and deal with these new realities. They have direct contact with grassroots America--not only with the 18-20 year-old age group but also with adults of all ages. Since a substantial majority of students who enroll in community colleges do not transfer to senior colleges and universities, it means that their formal education ends there. This fact becomes even more significant with the franchisement of 18 year-old youth. If these millions of new voters are to make informed decisions on issues relating to our government's role in world affairs, a major responsibility confronts community colleges of the nation. Apart from international political and economical considerations, there is the personal enrichment which comes from understanding other cultures.

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Community colleges have a responsibility to make a serious effort to bring this enrichment to those they serve.

Educating for international understanding is probably more important for community colleges than it is in senior colleges and universities. As a group, these students are more provincial than those who attend senior colleges and universities. The majority have spent their lives in the same community where they attend a community college. Few of them have traveled abroad. Many from lower socio-economic backgrounds have done no traveling--let alone having been abroad.

Reasons for Limited Past Development

There are a number of reasons why community colleges have placed little emphasis on educating for international understanding. Among them are the following:

--Lack of commitment to international understanding as an educational goal. It is a widely held assumption that international education is a significant area of study for universities and senior colleges but not for locally oriented community colleges. They have received little encouragement from the national or state levels to give explicit attention to educating for international understanding. Consequently, community college administrators generally have been reluctant to give it emphasis.

--Conservative orientation of many communities. Administrators, being sensitive to the political climate of their communities sometimes feel that emphasizing international understanding amounts to waving a red flag in the face of local citizens. Understandably, when a community college is dependent upon its local community for financial support, there is a reluctance to push programs which might alienate the local citizenry. This is not to imply that

public senior colleges and even universities are spared such pressures through state legislatures and influential groups.

--Limitations of faculty backgrounds. Compared to senior colleges and universities, community college faculties are at a disadvantage when it comes to educating for international understanding. Many of them are characterized by the same provincialism as are their students. They have spent their lives in communities like the one in which they teach. They are obviously handicapped in bringing an international perspective to their teaching. This is not to suggest that senior colleges and universities do not have faculty members with this limitation nor that there are not community college instructors with a world view.

--Lack of effective and authentic curriculum materials. Most of the curriculum materials available in this area are in written form and applicable primarily to the graduate and upper division levels. Where they are available in community college libraries and classrooms, their usefulness is limited for many students who are enrolled in community colleges. Such students need written material which is not highly abstract along with audio-visual materials such as films and tapes for effective learning. While those same types of materials are also effective with upper division and graduate students, many of them can function well with abstract material. Another problem is that much of the available materials which could be used effectively with community college students lacks authenticity. Too much of it presents an inaccurate romanticized or negative stereotyped view of other countries and cultures.

--Lack of flexibility in curriculums. Both a real and an imagined difficulty confronted by community colleges where desire exists to educate for international understanding is how to find time in the curriculum to do it. Transfer programs may have little flexibility due to the requirements

imposed by senior colleges and universities. Career education curriculums often have even less flexibility because of the specialized courses that are judged needed to develop occupational competencies. Added to these two restrictions may be state laws which require for the associate degree or a diploma, courses like The American Economic System, American Government, and United States History, further reducing options. Finally, community college curriculum committees are often no less conservative than are those of senior colleges and universities in making curriculum changes.

The Time is Now

Community colleges never had a greater opportunity nor was the need ever greater than now for them to address themselves to educating for international understanding. Advocates of international cooperation and involvement are no longer prophets without honor. Recent actions in the international realm by the executive branch of our government have removed or greatly reduced the risk formerly present or assumed by being an active advocate of international understanding. Community college administrators and faculties should make commitments to that end. It seems reasonable to assume that a climate receptive to international understanding exists in rural communities especially which are realizing financial gains from the recent sales of grain to Russia and China.

Making the commitment. This requires that presidents go on record to this end with their boards. They and their chief academic officers should do the same with their faculties. It may be necessary to reaffirm this expression of commitment to faculty several times to get the effort underway. Chief academic officers might want to form ad hoc committees to make plans for developing a coordinated institutional effort. Consideration should be given to including members of the community on such committees.

Overcoming limitations of faculty backgrounds. The major effort here should be to get faculty members to undergo international experiences--especially those who have never been abroad. This last point warrants elaboration. What happens too often is that faculty members who have traveled, studied, and worked abroad are the ones who seek additional opportunities for such experiences while those who have never been abroad show little interest. A community college which wants to increase its emphasis on international understanding needs to place emphasis on the latter group. There are a number of ways to do this. Following are some examples:

--Award service credit and salary increments for travel abroad by those who have done little or none of it.

--Urge faculty members who are eligible for paid leaves to develop applications which involve study and work abroad.

--Take advantage of sponsored programs which provide faculty members opportunities to study and work abroad. The best source for identifying U.S. Office of Education opportunities is an annual publication entitled, Opportunities Abroad for Teachers, available from:

Institute of International Studies
U.S. Office of Education
Washington, D.C. 20202

The type and number of such opportunities depend in substantial part upon legislative appropriations which seem to become more unpredictable with time. Some of these programs are applied for by individuals, whereas others must be applied for by an institution, group of institutions, an educational organization, or an educational agency. Other sources of information on opportunities for teachers abroad are:

Conference Board of Associated Research Councils
Committee on International Exchange of Persons
2101 Constitution Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20418

Institute of International Education
809 United Nations Plaza
New York, NY 10017

--Develop exchange programs with institutions in other countries. Some of these exchanges may require command of a foreign language. A number of our community colleges have exchanges with Canadian community colleges and a few have developed or explored exchanges with institutions in places such as Taiwan, Norway and Yugoslavia. For countries which do not have comprehensive institutions similar to our community colleges, exchanges can sometimes be arranged with universities and technical institutes.

Overcoming the lack of effective and authentic curriculum materials. Some good curriculum materials are now available and more are being produced that can be effectively utilized by community colleges interested in educating for international understanding. Examples follow:

(1) The Asia Society has developed excellent instructional materials on Asian countries. Much of it could be effectively used with portions of the diverse student bodies which comprise community colleges. A bibliography of these materials can be obtained from: Dr. Seymour Fersh
The Asia Society
112 East 64th Street
New York, NY 10021

(2) Foreign Area Materials Center, New York State Department of Education. This center has developed excellent curriculum materials on India. Inquiries should be directed to: Dr. Ward Morehouse
Foreign Area Materials Center
State Department of Education
Albany, NY 12225

(3) Several community colleges have received USOE grants under its recently initiated program entitled Strengthening the International Dimension of General Education (NDEA - Title VI). It provides grants of up to $30,000 to support innovative efforts by institutions of higher education to develop and strengthen the international dimension of their undergraduate general

educational programs. Some excellent curriculum materials for community colleges should be forthcoming from that program if legislative appropriations make possible its continuation. To cite an example, a consortium of community colleges received a grant under that program the first year it was funded. The consortium, headed by Miami-Dade Junior College is developing instructional modules in the areas of trans-national concerns, comparative case studies, and cultural differences. The materials being produced are applicable for the social sciences, the natural sciences, the humanities, and environmental problems. For specific information on materials available and how they can be obtained, contact:

Dr. Frank Bouwsma, Vice-President
Miami-Dade Junior College
11011 S.W. 104th Street
Miami, FL 33156

Miami-Dade Junior College is also participating with Syracuse University on a Yugoslavian project which involves the development of valuable instructional materials applicable for community college use. Inquiry can also be made to Dr. Bouwsma on that project.

Another type of project which has resulted in the projection of tapes, slides and instructional units which are available to other institutions at a modest cost is represented by the 1972 Community College Summer Seminar in Yugoslavia. That Seminar involved 22 community college social science instructors who spent seven weeks in Yugoslavia during which time they took many pictures, taped interviews and lectures, and prepared reports. Subsequently, these resources were evaluated and those judged useful were prepared for instructional use. For further information on how to order them, write to:

League for Innovation in the Community College
1100 Glendon Avenue
Westwood Center - Suite 925
Los Angeles, CA 90024

Still another way to overcome the lack of effective instructional materials in this area is the USOE Foreign Curriculum Consultant Program. It is a matching grant program between USOE and participating institutions which brings specialists from other countries here to help develop foreign language and area studies. Several community colleges can share such a curriculum specialist for an academic year which makes the cost to each institution modest. For further information on this program, write to:

Division of Foreign Studies
Institute of International Studies
U.S. Office of Education
Washington, D.C. 20202

Developing curriculum flexibility. The required courses in any curriculum represent someone's priorities--often priorities that were established in the distant past. Every educational institution, especially community colleges, should review these priorities at fairly frequent intervals to see if changing conditions warrant their being reordered. An indication that this often may not be done is the frequency with which Ancient Civilization is still required or recommended general education course in community colleges. The reason given may be that universities require this course for transfer students. Whether that is really the case or used as an excuse is subject to question. Even if it is, the requirement does not hold for the large number of students who are not in transfer programs.

In addition to formal courses which can contribute to world understanding are numerous informal and non-traditional experiences. Some examples are cultural programs, speakers, and community resources. This latter category can include the use of foreign cultural groups in the community for "international experiences." In many communities, especially cities, these offer rich resources for developing international understanding. Few institutions make adequate use of their foreign students as an instructional resource.

While study and travel abroad for community college students also has merits, it is ruled out for many students who need it most due to the cost. Some community colleges have become involved in student programs abroad without adequate planning and coordination. The result is that the programs may be high in cost and low in educational value. Community colleges planning to develop such programs should review guidelines which have been developed for such programs. One such reference is entitled, Study and Travel Programs Abroad: Guidelines for Two-Year College Students, by Raymond E. Schultz. It can be obtained from:

ERIC Clearinghouse for Junior Colleges
Topical Paper No.35
UCLA - University Library
Los Angeles, CA 90024

Summary

Hopefully, this article has left the reader with two basic conclusions. One, that educating for international understanding is both an important and timely role for community colleges. Second, that where a commitment to that goal exists, numerous resources and means are available to community colleges for achieving it.